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LINGUISTIC RELATIONS BETWEEN ENGLAND AND RUSSIA

(A lecture given at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies
in April, 1944)

MR. LEO LOEWENSON, in his article entitled "Some Recent Books on Russian History",¹ is able to list a fairly presentable collection of English books revealing knowledge of and quickening interest in Russian history. But the linguistic relations of the two countries, and the intimately connected matters of their literary relations, have received almost no attention at all. Of matters of the mutual influences and relationships between England and Russia, only the history of their political and diplomatic dealings with each other, and, to a far less extent, a few aspects of their literary inter-influences, have been studied: and even an occasional scholarly work like that of Professor E. Simmons² has found it necessary to aim mainly at the general reader ignorant of Russian. A number of articles in *The Slavonic Review* form an honourable exception to the above statement: but apart from them nothing has, I think, appeared in English save Madame Jarintsov's attractive—but entirely romantic and sentimental—book, *The Russians and their Language* (Blackwell, 1916).

Yet the primary importance of the subject of linguistic relations becomes obvious as soon as it is thought of. Only by mutual study of each other's language—and consequently of the minds of the peoples who made the languages—can a real understanding between the English and the Russians arise. Much light, too, would be thrown on the historical developments and inter-relations of the two peoples by a study of the history and inter-influences of the two languages.

In the following somewhat desultory remarks, I shall limit myself entirely to Russian—or, to be more exact—Great Russian. For though the Soviet Union embraces so many languages—both those having a long and cultured tradition and those which have only come to be written down through the practical zeal of Soviet philologists—it is only Great Russian or Muscovite—the language of official Russia since its first contacts with Western Europe—that has had significant, and productive contacts with English. It is, nevertheless, true that the linguistic policy of the Soviets is an example of a most practical liberalism. For not only is each language encouraged as a practical means of local cultural development, but the rehabilitation of the study of all kinds of philology, after the early suspicions of what the early revolutionaries regarded as a "Bourgeois science", has made rapid advances of late years. A glance at the literary and linguistic sections of the Bulletin of the Soviet Academy of Sciences (Академия Наук, for instance, shows a full-length article on the structure of the Indo-European languages, together with studies of the textual criticism of the work of the great Uzbek and Azerbaidzhan poets, and a discussion of the keenness on philology evinced by Engels at one period of his life. Moreover, it also appears that steps are being officially taken to prepare a dictionary of Old Slavonic for use in schools: and one vainly tries to imagine a British government giving official backing to the preparation of an Anglo-Saxon dictionary during a world war!

What may be termed the general relations of English and Russian are sufficiently clear. That both are cognate Indo-European languages becomes apparent to everyone who can compare the Russian equivalents of English words like *brother*, *mother*, *sister*, *son*, etc. But the history of actual contacts and inter-influences between Slavonic and Germanic began long before English and Russian had emerged as languages. On the one hand, it seems likely that

¹ *History*, 1943, pp. 207–15.

² *English Literature in Russia, 1550–1840*; Harvard, 1935.

contacts between Goths and Slavs near the Black Sea caused the Goths to adopt the Slavonic words represented by the Russian *платъ* and *платать* in their words *plats* (a piece of cloth) and *plinsian* (to dance); while on the other, the Slavonic words for *bread* and *milk* represented by the Russian *хлеб* and *молоко*, seem to have been adopted from Germanic types seen in the Gothic *hlaifs* and in the modern English *milk*.

It is not, however, till late in the fourteenth century that we find any notable direct reference to Russia in English literature, namely Chaucer's mention of that country as one in which his ideal knight had fought with distinction: and it is, perhaps, significant that this is also the period when the first Russian word appears in Western Europe in the English and French *sable* from the Russian *соболь*. But the credit for the "discovery" of Muscovy has generally been attributed to a sixteenth-century explorer who belonged to the reign of Ivan the Terrible—the period of the first direct and historically attested influences of English upon Russian. For in the Parish Church at Chatham there is an inscription commemorating Stephen Borough, who died on 12 July, 1584, in these words: "He in his lifetime discovered Moscovia." The famous account of Chancellor's visit to the court of Ivan the Terrible—the first authentic surviving description of Russia in English—was written in Latin by the schoolmaster Clement Adams in 1554, under the title *Nova Anglorum ad Moscovitas navigatio, Hugone Willowbeio equite classis praefecto, et Richardo Cancelero nayarcho, Authore Clemente Adamo Anglo*. But this pioneer work only became well known in England through its inclusion in translation in Hakluyt's collection of 1589. The periods of major influential contacts between English and Russian have been conveniently, though very roughly, commonly regarded as four; and each of these has produced its permanent, if limited, linguistic results. These periods are the following: first that of Ivan the Terrible, "the English czar". This includes the varied Anglophil activities of Ivan himself, of Boris Godunov and of the False Dmitri. Although the aims of these men were connected with commerce, politics and war rather than any liking for the English for their own sake, their reigns mark a first inter-influence of the two languages. Secondly is the reign of Peter the First (whose Scottish and English technical helpers made Russian history) and the following eighteenth century. Thirdly there was the "golden age" of Russian literature indicated by the name of Pushkin. The English poetic influences on Pushkin and Lermontov are sufficiently well known; but almost every great writer of this period felt English influences, from the "grand translator" Zhukovsky to the novelist Gogol who perhaps knew English only at second hand. The fourth and last period of marked Anglo-Russian inter-influence is that which ushered in the Soviet revolution, showed its fullest characteristics in the years immediately following it, and still continues.

Before illustrating the fruits of these four periods of linguistic relations, let us glance at some revealing observations of English travellers and residents in Muscovy of the first period. The earliest recorded name given by themselves to the Slavonic peoples appears to have been *Slovene*; and this, with the modern Russian equivalent *славяне*, has plausibly been connected with the Russian word *слово* (speech). Were the Slavonic peoples of old thinking of themselves as "talkative" by comparison with the "dumb ones", the Germans, *немцы* from *немой* "dumb"? It is of interest to notice that Giles Fletcher, in his famous little treatise *Of the Russe Common Wealth*, 1591, emphasises and fully accepts this tradition, which was then evidently already taken for granted in Russia. For he derives *Sclavos* (which he says "they termed themselves") from *Sclava* "glory" (Russian *слава*). Both Fletcher and Jeremy Horsey at the close of the sixteenth century are struck by the Greek basis of the Russian character in writing: but the discerning Horsey was, I think, the first Englishman to notice the real affinities in style and capacity between ancient Greek and Russian. Philologists and others now are familiar with the remarkable parallels between Russian and Greek in the verbal "aspects" the "syllable-nuances" and the particles: but it is very striking to find Jeremy Horsey writing thus:

"Though but a plaine gramarian, and hauing som smake in the Graek, I ateyned by the *Affinitie therof* in shorth tyme to the readie and familier knowledge of their vulgar speech, the Slavonian tonge, *the most copious and elegant language in the world.*"¹

The somewhat rough-and-ready transliterations of Russian words and phrases by Horsey and Giles Fletcher may sometimes, I believe, throw light on the contemporary Muscovite pronunciation; and if we are tempted to smile at their crude renderings of what they thought they heard, it may be a chastening thought to remember that even to-day the problem of transliterating the Slavonic languages has by no means been fully surmounted. For in handling Slavonic languages we have to deal with three types of alphabet and their later modifications: the Cyrillic, the Glagolitic and the Latin; and of these, not even the revised Russian of the Soviet can be regarded as entirely satisfying phonetically or consistently and conveniently renderable in Latin characters as familiar in English usage. The spelling *knez* for the modern Russian князь, which is fairly consistent in both Fletcher and Horsey, may suggest that at the close of the sixteenth century the vowel of this word (ultimately cognate with the English *king*, as may be seen from the earliest Church-Slavonic form) was in a more fronted position and more raised than it is in the pronunciation of to-day's Russian; and this may represent a state of pronunciation somewhere between the original nazalized vowel of the type seen in Old Bulgarian and its modern Russian development. At any rate the English traders and ambassadors of the reign of Elizabeth were the first to attempt transliteration of Russian into English, as Horsey was the first to demonstrate the then Russian hand-writing.² Of Fletcher's efforts at transliteration, the following are typical:

po graecum	modern по грехом.
Ospodi pomeluy	modern господи помилуй.
Blasslavey Vladika	modern благослави младыка,
Zautrana.	modern заутреня,
skora pomosnick	modern скоро помощник.

It is worth noting that there is some reason to suppose—though it can by no means be said to be capable of proof—that the first beginnings of a Russian grammar made for Russians may have been the work of an Englishman, Jeremy Horsey. For he has the following somewhat ambiguous and mysterious passage, the full elucidation of which must probably wait till all his manuscript material has been thoroughly examined. Speaking of Fedor, afterwards the Patriarch Philarete, he writes, "Whose pleasure was, owt of his loue, in his yong years, to haue me make, in the Sclauonian carrector, in Latten wordes and phrases, a kynde of grammer, wherin he toke great delight."³ Apart from Horsey's dubious manuscript material implied in the above statement, the first serious Russian grammar was made, not in Russia, but in England; and its printing in 1696 is one of the early triumphs of the Clarendon Press. It was the work of Hedin Wilhelm Ludolf, and bears the following title: *Grammatica Russica, quae continet non tantum praecipua fundamenta linguae Russicae, verum etiam Manuductionem ad Grammaticam Slavonicam; e Theatro Sheldoniano, Oxon., 1696.* The beginnings of Anglo-Russian lexicography took shape in England long before there was a Russian dictionary proper. For a result of the visit to Russia of the learned Richard James in 1619, whose pioneer work in causing many of the *былины* to be transcribed with care is universally recognised, was a collection of manuscript material for a Russian-English dictionary. This is now being investigated by a very competent philologist, and I look forward to valuable results when the work comes to be published.

¹ *A Relacion or Memoriall abstracted out of Sir Jerom Horsey his Trauelles*, preserved in MS. Brit. Mus. Harley 1813, printed in the Hakluyt Society's volume for 1856, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century* (p. 156).

² Cf. Horsey, *op. cit.*, pp. 235 and 257.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 265.

In Russia, the first serious grammar was published nearly a century later than that of Ludolf, namely Lomonosov's pioneer *русская грамматика*. I now turn to the question of the foreign elements in the Russian vocabulary. Though German and French have played a far greater part than English in the development of the Modern Russian vocabulary, English has also made its contributions. I shall omit from consideration all those English words now current in Russian which belong to what I would call the "common European" language—that considerable body of mostly technical terms which are found in the leading European languages, adopted often independently from the particular language whose speakers had originally developed the technique or thing which the word describes.

Technical contacts with England, such as those of the times of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the First, and contacts in matters of fashion and politics, like the late eighteenth century and the late nineteenth century, have left a thin trail of words which remind us of aspects of Russian history. Thus, for instance, carpentry and naval seamanship—in which the English taught the Russians a good deal, have given the Russian words *мастер* with all its compounds (with a later usage of the word from the language of art), *фут* (cf. *указы фут* and the adjective *футовой*, *футке* (from futtocks), *контргимберы* (from counter-timbers), *красицы* (from crosspieces); and *англизировать* = "to trim a horse's tail" (in the English fashion, of course), *флирт* and *флиртовать* have come from fashion. It is well known that Krylov's favourite club was the *Английский Клуб* though this had long since ceased to bear any consciously English connotation. Medicine—beginning with Ivan the Terrible's employment of an English physician—has provided *шок* and the corresponding verb *шокировать*, and sport has given *бокс* and *боксовать*.

Historical parallels and speculations are suggested by the curious expression "English sickness" (*английская болезнь*), which, though often explained in dictionaries as "rickets," may well have meant syphilis. From political contacts or diplomacy have come *митинг* and *интервью*, the sources of which are obvious.

From English—apart from more or less common European technical terms like *sable* (our earliest English loan-word) and *knout* (whose spelling of the Russian *кнут* betrays the fact that it too must have come to English through French)—I mention the following fairly common words which have been adopted from Russian, classifying them roughly under the four main periods of linguistic contact and influence mentioned earlier.

In what follows, where the English spelling is other than that now current, it is that of the first occurrence of the word concerned. To the Elizabethan and early Jacobean period belong *kvass*, (*квас*), *mousik* (*музык*), and *rouble* (*рубль*). To the second (the eighteenth century) are generally assigned *verst* (*верст*), *steppe* (*степ*) whose spelling suggests borrowing through French, *knout* (*кнут*) which is again through French as already indicated, *ukase* (*указ*)—perhaps French too—and *mammoth*. This last is the only one which has continued to live in the ordinary language of to-day. It has even developed a common adjectival usage. Ludolf in his *Grammatica Russica* of 1696 cites the Russian word as *мамонт*; and this must lie behind the English form, though the modern Russian is *мамонт*.

To the third period—the reigns of Alexander the First and Nicholas the First—belong *vodka*, *droshki*, *samovar*, *Uniat*, *tundra* and *troyka*. Of these *Uniat*, from the Russian *унят* (a word specially coined to express the peculiar relationship of the branch of the Orthodox Church in the Ukraine which accepted terms for union with Rome), is the only one which has developed and widened in usage in English from these special beginnings.

To the fourth and still continuing period, that of the immediate pre-revolutionary age and the time since—belong a considerable number of political words which came into use to express the rising revolutionary democracy which has become the U.S.S.R. *Duma* and *pogrom* look back to the latest Czarist period,

though *pogrom* has remained in use with widening connotations. To the revolution proper belong *Ogpu* (made from the initial letters of the four Russian words объединенное государственное политическое управление) and *Cheka* (made from the names of the initials of the two words чрезвычайная and комиссия. The words *Bolshevik* and *Menshevik* (especially the former) had their day in the first post-revolutionary years, but are now relatively little used; yet the vulgar form *Bolshy* has remained a lively part of ordinary speech with considerable deviations from and widening of its proper meaning. But apart from this last, it is doubtful if any of the new words especially connected with the Bolshevik revolution will have much more linguistic life except in books. The term *Soviet*, of course, since it describes a new ideal and way of life, and since it pertains to an institution likely to be enduring, must stand in a class by itself among these originally political words and may properly be regarded as an important addition to the living language; yet because it is, after all, a "common European" word in the fullest sense, it scarcely belongs to the narrower field of Anglo-Russian—rather than Anglo-Western—linguistic relations which we have been exploring. Another somewhat "common European" word of this fourth period is *Intelligentsia*, a Polish word adopted into Russian, and probably from thence into "Common European" including English. But yet it is not entirely clear whether its insertion into Eastern European languages is to be regarded as direct from Russian or from Polish.

One of the most fruitful, and at the same time, most baffling of linguistic contacts is that of the art of translation and the related matters of literary inter-influence. From the days of Ivan the Terrible and Boris Godunov till now, English cultural influences have made themselves felt—sometimes only slightly, sometimes in a strong and definitely formative way—though it must never be forgotten that often these influences were only part of a much larger cultural stream from Western Europe. When giving the news of the death of Ivan the Terrible, his Chancellor said to the English representative, "Your English czar is dead": and though Ivan's aims in encouraging English visitors were connected with commerce and war-munitions and training rather than with culture, the presence of so many Englishmen in Russia could not but have its effect. The False Dmitri was a great Westerniser: and though the then attempts to have young Russians educated in England came to very little, it was an experiment repeated with greater success later—especially by Peter the First. It is with Peter the First that the study of the problems of translation first began in Russia. He caused technical works to be translated into Russian from French, German and English, and took a personal interest in this work. A discerning saying of his is preserved in the following direction which he gave to his translators: "You must beware of translating word for word without knowing the complete meaning of the text. You must read with care, become penetrated with the sense of your author, must be able to think his thoughts in Russian, and then only after that try to reproduce them."¹ By the later eighteenth century English literature proper had come to be translated and imitated freely, and English authors, both great and small, came to be enjoyed, discussed and translated among the intelligentsia of St. Petersburg and Moscow. Thomson, Young, the Ossianic translations, Sterne, Gray, Otway and Mackenzie of *The Man of Feeling* are names from a longish list that might be made of authors translated in the eighteenth century or just afterwards: and with the age of Pushkin came the vogue of Byron and Scott. Shakespeare had already been acted in a translated version in Moscow before the close of the seventeenth century; and the great play of *Boris Godunov* is a testimony to what the influence of Shakespeare could mean to a great Russian poet of the Golden Age. Sometimes, it is true, the English influences on literature were only indirect, as when Gogol's story, *Nevisky Prospekt*, used motives taken from De Quincey's *Opium-eater* obtained only through a French translation of the English work made by Alfred de Musset,

¹ Quoted by Christopher Marsden in his *Palmyra of the North, the First Days of St. Petersburg* (Faber, 1942).

from which a Russian rendering was published in 1834.¹ Never have Addison and Steele had such keen imitators as were some of the contributors to the literary Moscow periodicals of the later eighteenth century. In England the translation of works of Russian literature scarcely began before the nineteenth century: and while in the Soviet Union a committee of scholars is busily engaged on the study of the art of translating Shakespeare into Russian, translations appear in this country frequently, but without any sign of provoking a serious study of the methods and art of the translator's task. The one notable exception I have come across is the valuable study of Pushkin's English translators which Professor E. Simmons wrote soon after the poet's centenary; but this was, of course, an American work.²

The Swiss philologist Vossler used to divide language into what he called the "outer" and the "inner" language; and this distinction has an especial relevance to the translator's problem. The "outer" language, that is what expresses a common body of intuitive knowledge, is readily translatable from one European language into another: speakers of all of these languages readily understand the same thing as *dog* or *chien* or *собака*. But the "inner" sort of language, implying the special associations and annotations contained in words for those who fully share one and the same language, must always to some extent elude the translator. A *dog* suggests different associations and connotations to an Englishman, a Frenchman and a Russian. Consider, for instance, the Russian word *красный*. How many and varied are its meanings beyond the literal *red*! And when we speak of the Red Army or of *red speech* (*красное слово*), how little of the full Russian meaning is conveyed. Similarly, how seldom can we successfully translate the Russian *чуткость*, with its implication of a metaphor from olfactory sensitiveness! Other untranslatable Russian words are *простор*, *тоска*, *родной*, *бабушка*, *задушевный* and *грозный* (of which *Terrible* is so crude and incomplete a rendering in the title *Иоанн Грозный*). To indicate something of the kind of difficulty I have in mind, I quote Pushkin's well-known saying that "Shakespeare, like all great poets, was national, and therefore untranslatable".

This problem of the translation of the "inner" language is one which presents itself especially when attempting to render a great poem or the more colloquial parts of a good novel. But in rendering poetry there is the further difficulty of those who seek to imitate the rhythm or the rhyme or both, with consequent inevitable restriction or improper freedom in the use of words.

It is, no doubt, equally true that Russian translators of English find the same difficulties in rendering English; but Russian—with its peculiar metaphorical extensions of meaning, its particles, its verbal richness and its subtle syllabic nuances—offers, I think, altogether exceptional hardships to the translator. Sir Bernard Pares is acclaimed justly, both in Russia and in England, as a master in his translations of Krylov; and I would place beside him Professor Oliver Elton for his felicitous rendering of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. Both have sought, with marked success, to preserve alike the rhythm and the rhyme-types of their originals. Yet in both we constantly find the depths and subtleties of the Russian unexpressed in the translations and—especially in Sir Bernard Pares—a freedom of language which sometimes may seem to exceed the limits of what a translation should be allowed. I have illustrated this particular kind of difficulty in a review of Dr. Bowra's excellent volume of Russian translations: so I will content myself here with a curious example I have noticed in Sir Bernard Pares' altogether admirable selections from Krylov, in his rendering of the fable entitled *Parnassus*. Here Krylov—among other things—is satirizing what he considered to be the linguistic and stylistic affectations of Shishkov and some of the Russian Academicians of his day. In his lines—

"This cunning, quaint and curious speech
appealed in ass-like way to each"

¹ → "Gogol's Knowledge of English," by E. Simmons, in the *Modern Language Review* for 1931.

² "English Translators of Eugene Onegin," *Slavonic Review* for 1938, pp. 200 ff.

the linguistic satire of the Russian scarcely appears. Krylov had written

« Одобрили ослы ослово
Красно-хитро-сплетенно слово : »

and the long compound-word with which he describes the asses' rhetoric is not really translated in its full suggestiveness. Similarly, the line

“ How ended this uproarious glorious song ? ”

does not convey the satire of the Russian compound describing the singing. For the question Krylov had asked was—

« Но чем окончилось разно-красиво пенье ? »

Nevertheless it is also true that Sir Bernard Pares has, in perhaps an even more difficult task than that of Professor Elton, reached the highest excellence within his chosen method that could be attained ; and again and again in these Fables he has managed to convey just the right idiomatic colouring in English.

But in general, our translations in this country are without the advantages which might come from a real tradition of Russian scholarship, which has yet to be built up, and without that background of corporate study of the art and method of the translator which the Soviet scholars are definitely seeking to establish for their side of the problem. Too often, too, translations are based either on intermediary French or German versions without direct use of the Russian originals, or on literal renderings made by native workers revised and given their literary qualities by English “ translators ” who are themselves not really familiar with Russian.

There is no need to labour the obvious point that this matter of translation is of the utmost importance for the whole future of Anglo-Soviet relations and for the mutual understanding of the English and Russian peoples. What a relatively poor conception of the Revolutionary poet Mayakovsky must be given to English readers by a popular but scarcely literary version like that of Mr. Herbert Marshall in his rendering of selected poems—a labour of love performed with every ideological sympathy but without the necessary equipment of the linguist and the poet ! Yet before any translation of moment had appeared in England from the Russian, Zhukovsky had rendered Gray's *Elegy* into alexandrines with both poetic feeling and with knowledge. Even he, however, may serve to illustrate the fact that the same sort of difficulties I have been discussing from the English side are also not absent from the Russian. Take, for instance, his rendering of the opening of Gray's *Elegy*, second stanza, of which the original is—

“ Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds.”

Zhukovsky translates thus :

« В туманном вумраке окрестность исчезает ;
Повсюду тихина, повсюду мертвый сон.»

Here is both beauty and the spirit of the original : yet the English connotations of the word *glimmering* have not been conveyed at all in the Russian, and the second line shows a freedom which perhaps suggests a feeling rather different from that intended by Gray.¹

What is the remedy, on the English side of the problem, for these and similar difficulties ? Professor E. Simmons goes to the heart of the matter in the concluding passage of his already-mentioned article on English Translations of Eugene Onegin.² Of Pushkin's translators he writes :

“ I am sure that no one of these translators feels that he has revealed in English the full glory of Pushkin's language and the ineffable harmony of his form. Until we have several generations of cultural English-speaking people

¹ See E. Simmons in *Slavonic Review* for 1938, *loc. cit.*

² *Slavonic Review* for 1938, p. 208.

brought up in the knowledge of Russian as they are in French and German, the true genius and full stature of Pushkin as a great poet will never be fully appreciated among us." And what is true of Pushkin will hold good for any of the best and most characteristic Russian poetry. Superficially at least, gone are the days when the English poet Turberville (in the days of Ivan the Terrible) could speak of the Russians, after a brief visit to Russia, as

"Bloody, rude and blind".

Gone too, one hopes, is the feeling behind the Russian poet's description of Englishmen in the line—

«Паук, сороконожка фигура англичан.»

But to reduce our own insularity on the one hand, and Russian suspiciousness on the other in our cultural relations with the U.S.S.R., there is a primary need for alike a generation of Russian Anglophils and English Russophils. This cannot, of course, be hoped for on any popular scale. But if Russian could be put on proper foundations in Britain—foundations which must include a basis in some of the upper forms of selected schools—then, in time, a select band of scholarly and informed Russophils linked by real knowledge and understanding to equivalent bodies of Russian Anglophils, might so influence the wider educated public of Britain as to produce one day that generation which shall be able to appreciate Pushkin fully and translate Russian poetry in the truest sense of the word. Though Madame Jarintsov's study (produced under the impetus of the last world war) of the nature of the Russian language and the intimately related psychology of its speakers is neither scholarly nor fully informed, yet it does point the way along which valuable further study of the two languages might profitably move. Russian grammars abound in English: but—apart from Professor Jopson's brilliant but all too brief essay on the Russian language in his and Professor Boyanus' pioneer work on *Spoken Russian*—I know of no study of the nature of the Russian language, since the brief observations of Morfill in his Russian grammar and elsewhere, with the requisite philological scholarship.

There is indeed work to be done by Russophils.

C. L. WRENN.

London.